

APOSTLES



O
F

T
H
E

FROZEN NORTH

By Rev. T. HAUGH, O.M.I.

The Oblate Missionary

The Northland trail winds far,
And a voice keeps calling, calling,
Like the sad and low complaining
Of ebb-waves on the sea;
The Northland trail winds far,
And 'tis I would fain go straying
Where that lonely voice a-sorrowing
Calls to me.

The Northland skies are grey,
And weary eyes are seeking
The light of heaven shining
'Mid clouds of doubt and care;
But see God's brightening day
Across the dark wastes stealing
Faith's rays stream through the dawn-mist,
Smiling fair.

The Northland trail winds on,
Till the eye is faint with watching,
But the Master's voice is calling
At the ending of the way;
And across the great "Lone Land"
I can see a white host thronging,
While the Cross, in triumph lifted,
Holds the day.

M. F. O.M.I.

ST. THOMAS COLLEGE

LIBRARY

NORTH BATTLEFORD, SASK.

APOSTLES OF THE FROZEN NORTH

BY

REV. THOMAS HAUGH

Oblate of Mary Immaculate

*(Reprinted by courtesy of the Author and
The Australian Catholic Truth Society)*

2nd. PRINTING

ST. THOMAS COLLEGE
LIBRARY
NORTH BATTLEFORD, SASK.

"LOURDES MESSENGER" PUBLICATIONS
OBLATE FATHERS

· INCHICORE

1949

DUBLIN

Imprimi potest :

M. BUTLER, O.M.I.,

Vicarius Provincialis.

Dublin, 12a Junii, 1949.

Nihil obstat :

JACOBUS HENDLEY,

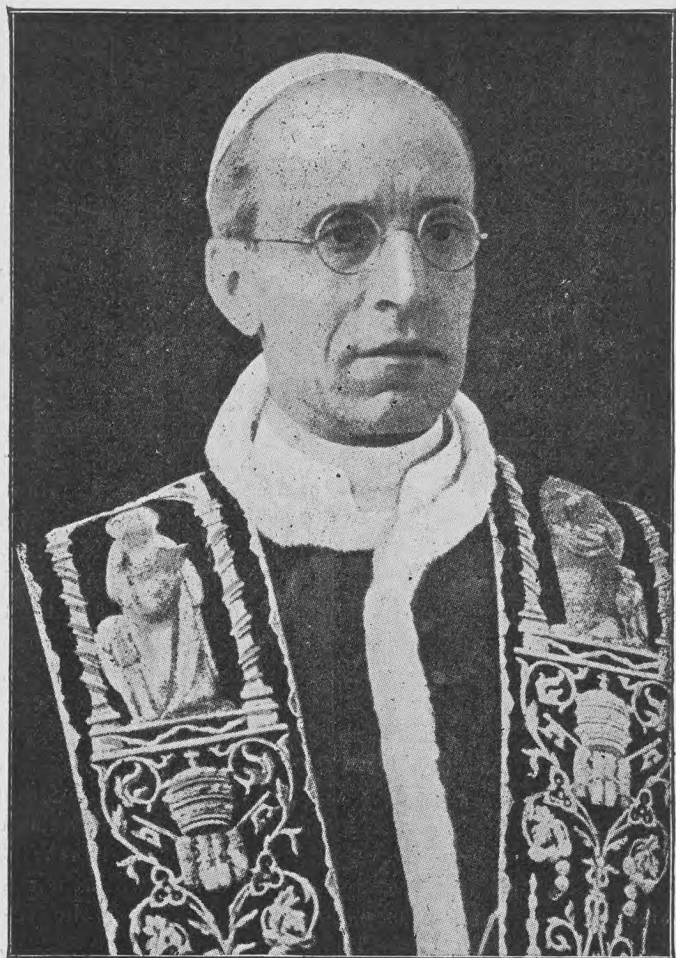
Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur :

✠ DANIEL MAGEEAN

Epus. Dunen et Connoren.

Belfast, 14a Junii, 1949.



POPE PIUS XII.

FOREWORD

by

RIGHT REV. MONSIGNOR HENDLEY, P.P., V.G.

Archdeacon, Diocesan Director Pontifical Society for the
Propagation of the Faith.

I have read through Fr. Haugh's "Apostles of the Frozen North" with very real pleasure. The story of the labours of the Oblate Missionaries cannot fail to awaken in a Catholic mind memories of the labours of the first missionary to the Gentiles—"in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils in the sea, in labour and painfulness, in much watchings, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness." Their generous self-sacrifice, with its patient endurance of hardship and suffering, is the showing forth of the mark of sanctity inherent in the Church of Christ. Perhaps, too, the story of their toils will arouse a sense of shame and self-dissatisfaction in the minds of many readers, ready, as they have been, to do so little for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. Apart from the story of the missionaries, Fr. Haugh's little book contains a wealth of extremely interesting information of the Wild North Land and its inhabitants. I trust it will reach a wide circle of readers as a sort of reminder of the responsibilities of the Christian Apostolate.

JAMES HENDLEY,

Belfast, 15th June, 1949.

INTRODUCTION

Her foreign missionaries are the front-line soldiers of the Church Militant. In tropical heats and amidst snow and ice: in labyrinthine jungle and on open prairie — wherever the strongholds of paganism are to be conquered, heroic men in every age, march forward at the call of the Supreme Commander, the Sovereign Pontiff, to extend the frontier of Christ the King.

Unfortunately the toils, adventures and achievements of our missionaries are neither sufficiently known nor appreciated. Seeking no press headlines, isolated from the pale of civilization, wielding the tradesman's tools more often than the pen, their heroic lives are only too frequently a closed book even to our Catholic people. This is especially true in the case of the Oblate missionaries of North-western Canada. For over a century they have laboured amongst the Red Indian Tribes of the "Great Lone Land." From the thousand islands of the St. Lawrence to the Minefields of the Yukon: and from the United States border to the everlasting Arctic snows, they have been pioneers of Faith and civilization. They have planted the Cross upon the frozen dome of the earth, and extended the frontiers of the Church to the furthest limits of human habitation. Yet the epic story of their selfless devotion and amazing missionary achievements has scarcely even been heard in this country.

An attempt is made in the following pages to give a brief outline of that Northern Apostolate. A mere outline it necessarily is, for the perspective is so vast, the achievements so colossal, and the hardships endured so formidable, in that most difficult of all mission-fields, that volumes of ecclesiastical history would be required properly to assess them.

Sorrento,
Melbourne.

THOMAS HAUGH, O.M.I.
17th Feb., 1949.



Pius XI. Pope of the Missions.

Apostles of the Frozen North

CHAPTER I.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE immense territories called North-West Canada or Rupert's Land, were for the most part unknown at the beginning of the 19th century. To the people of the Eastern parts of the Dominion, the regions out West were fear-inspiring — wild expanses of forests primeval and snow-bound prairie — the vast hunting-grounds of warring, scalping Indian savages. The latent potentialities of the now fertile fields of Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan, were then only a dream.

It is true several intrepid explorers and scientists had ventured into those mysterious lands to trace their great rivers and map out the location of their numerous lakes or inland seas. All of these brave men paid dearly for their adventures and discoveries — many of them never returned to civilization. In 1793, Mackenzie, the daring and thorough Scotsman, succeeded in making his way to the Polar Sea, by following the course of the giant river which bears his illustrious name. But Sir John Franklin, searching for the long illusive North-West Passage, perished along with 100 of his brave followers in the Arctic ice. And Hudson, after many outstanding voyages of discovery, was slain by the Indians on the southern shore of the great Bay which enshrines the memory of his pioneering exploits.

The fur-traders too, hard, cruel and relentless, stalked the frozen wilderness, and established posts along the fringe of forests, to gather in the precious pelts of beaver, ermine, coloured fox and mink, which returned almost their weight in gold in the fashionable marts of Europe. Yet the greater part of the North-west territories remained uncharted lands.

From an ecclesiastical point of view, the diocese of Quebec had jurisdiction over those regions, but no priest was stationed there until the second decade of the 19th century. The conquest of Canada by Britain had for many years hampered missionary enterprise, especially in the West. In 1818, however, Lord Selkirk favoured the advent

of Catholic missionaries to his new colony on the banks of the Red River. Besides these new settlers who came from Britain and Ireland, there were some hundreds of Canadian Forest Rangers and Metis (half-breeds) in that area. In response to the requests of the colonists, Bishop Plessis of Quebec sent two priests to the Selkirk settlement. One of these, Fr. Provencher, was consecrated Bishop in 1822, and entrusted with the whole North-west as his Apostolic-Vicariate.

For 20 years this zealous Prelate laboured with only a small staff of priests. Quebec had not sufficient clergy to meet its own demands, and life in the far West was so isolated and depressing that even brave spirits became discouraged at its prospects. A cathedral church, dedicated to St. Boniface, was erected on the banks of the River, and later the Vicariate was named after the Patron of the Cathedral. Bishop Provencher had to despatch two of his missionaries to attend to the French-Canadian Catholics in the distant Oregon country. Another of his small band of priests was assassinated by the Red Indians near the Mission of Le Pas which he had just founded.

Eventually only six priests were left in a territory as large as Europe. During 20 years of pioneering, Bp. Provencher's clergy had contacted the aborigines and paved the way for their conversion. But the Bishop of St. Boniface was convinced that there was little hope of carrying on his work without a continual flow of missionaries.

To guarantee this source of supply he would need the assistance of a Religious Order or Congregation. This assistance he sought and received from the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who for some years had been labouring among the tribes of Saguenay and Labrador. The real evangelization of the North and West began with the arrival of these missionaries in 1845.

We who live in this age of easy travel and communication find it difficult to picture the very primitive conditions of that Northern Land 100 years ago. The Vicariate of St. Boniface extended from Ontario to the Pacific Coast: and from the borders of U.S.A. to the Arctic Ocean. In all that territory there was neither road, nor railway, nor sign-post, nor telegraph. Even the southern prairies to-day so rich in productivity, were then considered outside the pale of cultivation.

Throughout the Far North, grim winter held sway for nine months of the year, during which all rivers and lakes were frozen, and the vast landscape enveloped in a white mantle of thick snow. Locked in their icy manacles, the greater part of those remote solitudes had never seen a white man.

Two vast waterways flow through those immense regions, one towards the East, and the other to the North. The Saskatchewan is the river of the prairies. Rising in the Rocky Mountains on a 1200 mile course, it gathers into its immense bosom all the lesser prairie rivers—carries them to Lake Winnipeg, whence they reach the Nelson, and are poured into Hudson Bay. The second river is the Athabaska - Mackenzie, the dangerous highway of the North. It, too, has its source in the Rockies, whence it flows to Lake Athabaska. From here the Slave River leads it to Great Slave Lake, after which it is called simply the Mackenzie. On its winding course it is swollen by the waters of at least twelve great tributaries, which increase its width from 5 to 25 miles outside Great Slave Lake, and to 75 miles as it reaches the Arctic Ocean. This vast watery highway rolls 2500 miles, first through prairie and primeval forest, and then between gigantic cliffs of granite, which rise as parallel ramparts above the yawning chasms. Finally, it flows majestically into the Polar Sea between the far-off lines of awe-inspiring mountain glaciers.

These two immense rivers were for many years the only known routes to the West and the North for the missionaries' canoes during the summer months, while their frozen beds provided the wintry "highways" for the dog-teams — the only means of conveyance on apostolic journeyings.

The Mackenzie has been the watery grave of four Oblate missionaries on active service in the Far North, and at least six others have been drowned in its tributaries. The miraculous escapes of scores of others are beyond reckoning.

Due to the mountain-ranges in the extreme West and East, and the "height of land" in between, the rivers of the North-West have waterfalls of hundreds of feet in innumerable places. These falls take the form of cascades, cataracts or rapids. The first two defy the power and wit of man to pass up or down: but the "rapid" may be conquered by skill, strength and daring. "Shooting the

Rapids" in barge or canoe has been the frequent and terrifying experience of the missionaries in their pioneering labours.

Such, in general, was the aspect of the Red Man's wild domain—the home of the caribou, polar-bear, wolf, fox and reindeer.

It is estimated that about 70,000 aborigines wandered through the North-west territories in 1845. At one time there were probably hundreds of thousands of those "noble savages," but continual tribal warfare, famine and disease, had so thinned their ranks that some tribes had disappeared altogether.

The aboriginal inhabitants belonged to three main nations or families, viz.: The Denee, Crees (or Cris), and the Eskimo. The Denees occupied the forests of Athabaska and the territories adjoining Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes. They were also numerous on the western side of the Rockies in British Columbia and the Yukon. The Denee tribes rejoiced in rather significant designations: Hareskins, Dog - Ribs, Yellow - Knives, Caribou - Eaters, Squint-Eyes, Castors, Beavers, Slaves and Montagnais.

The Crees, milder by nature, inhabited the southern prairies and the banks of the Peace River; while the Eskimos roamed the barren and desolate lands of the Arctic from Alaska to Labrador.

The Red-Skin Tribes were guided only by the laws of the jungle. Struggle for survival, barbarism and superstition, were the sad lot of these unhappy savages. With them woman had no rights. She was a slave, beaten, exchanged, sold, mutilated or killed, as the Red-Man might choose. Before the whites came and taught them the use of dogs and horses, women were harnessed to the sledges and used to pull the burdens of hunting and fishing expeditions. If there were too many girls in the family to meet the demand for husbands, they were considered an encumbrance in the struggle for existence, and were strangled or otherwise liquidated.

Cannibalism, although not a general practice, was still only too frequent among the Red Indians and Eskimos, especially in seasons of great scarcity. When the grim spectre of Famine appeared over the land, the women and children were the first to suffer. They were killed and devoured by the savage males, driven insensate by the pangs of hunger.

The morality of the Indian was not improved by his contact with the white fur-traders. The latter, amongst other abuses, taught the Indians the use of spirituous liquors, the more easily to barter the precious furs of the North. This practice became a widespread scourge, for under the influence of the "fire-water" the savages became infuriated and committed the most horrible crimes amongst their own people.

Such was the raw material out of which the missionaries were to evolve good Christians. Virgin soil indeed for the Oblates of the Immaculate Virgin! It was the sad plight and spiritual destitution of the wandering tribes which prompted the Oblate Fathers to penetrate those inhospitable regions. They invaded that pagan empire of darkness to bring the light and consolations of our holy Faith to the dusky nomads of a land forlorn.

One might reverently ask why God sent His missionaries by preference to a comparatively small number of savages, scattered through a country so difficult of access, where communication was so uncertain, climate so severe—in a word, where all moral and physical difficulties were accumulated: when so many millions of souls, in lands easy to reach, with delightful climates, were only waiting for the teaching of the Gospel to be converted? Truly He must love dearly those Indian savages because of their poverty and abandonment. And because He loved them so, He chose a Congregation to lead them to Him, founded and imbued with a predilection for the most abandoned souls.



CHAPTER II.

FOUNDATIONS

THE first Oblate missionaries to reach the Red River were Frs. Aubert and Tache. They arrived in August, 1845, after 62 days of continuous travel from Lachine in a birch-canoe. When the venerable Bishop Provencher met the youthful Tache (only 22 years old) he must have been somewhat disappointed. He naturally would have preferred more "seasoned" missionaries. Little did the good Bishop think that within five years that young priest would be his coadjutor—a year later his successor—and finally Archbishop of St. Boniface.

The two missionaries spent the winter learning the Sautaux language. Early in 1846 Fr. Tache was sent to the distant station of Ile a la Crosse, which he reached after eight weeks' travel, mostly on foot. Here he evangelized the Cree Indians for four years with most consoling results. On snow-shoes and by canoe, he made long and daring journeys to contact the Athabaskans and Chippewayans, until in his 28th year, he was appointed Coadjutor to Bishop Provencher. Consecrated in 1851, he was back again on his Indian Missions the following year, much to the delight of the new converts, whose language he spoke like themselves.

The young Bishop continued to do the work of a simple missionary. His house was a log-hut—a dog-sled his pullman car—his provisions very precarious. From wigwam to wigwam, and from camp to camp, he carried on his back his Mass-kit and meagre rations. He feared neither cold nor heat nor savage arrow. On the contrary he seemed to seek the crown of martyrdom. So absorbed was he in his apostolic labours that on the death of Bishop Provencher, he did not deem it necessary to return at once to headquarters. He continued his missionary travels among the Indians and half-breeds until 1854, when he journeyed South to take possession of his See.

In 1856 Bishop Tache was back again at Ile a la Crosse. By this time a number of Oblate missionaries had arrived, who were to give yeoman service in the foundation of the Church throughout the North-west. The names of Frs. Lacombe, Grollier, Grandin, Faraud, Petitot, Sequin, Clut,

Gascon, Grouard, etc., are indelibly written on the pioneering stages. During his visitation of the missions in 1856, Bishop Tache confirmed 700 converts and was pleased to note that the number of Baptisms was already over 5000. But it is not by studying the statistics of Baptisms, Confessions or Confirmations that we can assess the labours and hardships of those brave pioneers. Above all we see the value to the heart of a zealous missionary of even one soul. To perform one Baptism or to anoint a dying person, hundreds and hundreds of miles had often to be traversed, through trackless prairie and forest in the most difficult primitive conditions. The missionaries were undergoing the pangs of hunger—defying the rigours of the Arctic winters, and endless marches on snow-shoes for the scattered natives committed to their charge. Their courage and heroism were so striking and their successes so amazing, that they elicited the highest tributes from non-Catholic explorers and fur-traders.

New missions were opened far and wide; at Fort Edmonton, Athabaska, Vermillon, Lake Caribou, Providence, and in the Arctic regions. So vast had the field of labour become by 1858 that Bishop Tache was given a Coadjutor in the person of Fr. Vital Grandin. This zealous missionary arrived in the North-west in 1854, and had already endured more than his share of the privations facing every pioneer in those regions—cold, hunger, poverty and isolation. During one winter he travelled on foot and by dog-sled over 1200 miles, accompanied by two Montagnais noted for their revolting habits. For a whole year he tasted neither bread nor meat nor vegetables. His sole menu was fish, often tainted, frequently rotten.

Bishop Grandin was consecrated in 1859, and was entrusted with all the Northern parts of the vast Vicariate. His presence there was all the more necessary as a number of heretical ministers had arrived on the scene. To these fanatics the very name of priest was a bogey. They were well equipped with funds and provisions, and were in high favour with the senior officials of the all-powerful Hudson Bay Co. And as "music hath charms to soothe the savage breast," so, too, good food makes a special appeal to the savage stomach in a land where famine lurks round the corner. Hence Fr. Grollier was sent to Fort Simpson, where he held the newly-converted Indians in spite of tempting offers from the opposition. He established the important

mission of Good Hope on the Arctic Circle, while Fr. Gascon was preaching the Gospel to the natives of the Liard River.

Another mission was founded north of Great Slave Lake in a land so barren and desolate that the slow growth of centuries only adds 30 inches to the stunted trunks of the white spruce that attempt to grow there. The missionaries, in spite of extreme poverty, managed



Bishop Grandin, O.M.I.

not only to hold their own, but to increase the numbers of converts and foundations.

Bishop Grandin in 1861 took up residence at Providence, on the Mackenzie, devoting himself to incessant missionary toil. He and two of his confreres built the episcopal palace with their own hands. It was a log-hut, 30 by 20 feet, cemented with mud and only six feet high. It served as residence and chapel. When, on occasions, the Bishop carried out pontifical ceremonies, his mitre got caught in the rafters. Consequently he had to make more "profound bows" than the Liturgy demands on such occasions! In 1863 he wrote: "In my palace so far, there is neither bed nor chair. We sleep in the attic. We have only a few blunt tools, no writing paper, few altar breads and only one candle for Mass."

After a stupendous tour of all the Northern Missions, which lasted for three years and two months, one of the officials of the Hudson Bay Co. said to this intrepid Bishop: "The self-denial and admirable courage with which Your Lordship has endured such hardships are beyond all praise. For my part, although I have spent 15 years in these inhospitable climes, and I know the trials of the Far North, I would have recoiled before the obstacles which you have surmounted. If your relatives in France saw you as I see you, in a palace of logs, lighted only by a few pieces of parchment; your couch a few planks; and your furniture what a slave would cast aside in disdain; if they had seen your long and terrible journeys, often in a state of semi-starvation, they would have burst into tears. Your courage, example and heroism have excited the admiration of all the officers of the Hudson Bay Co."

It is said that Bishop Grandin's apostolic travels in his northern missions would cover a distance seven times round the globe. Appointed first Bishop of the newly-created diocese of St. Albert in 1871, he organized its institutions at the cost of tremendous sacrifices endured for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This great pioneer prelate died in the odour of sanctity in 1902. He was so revered for his holiness in life and in death, that the Cause of his Beatification was introduced in Rome in 1937.

Meanwhile in the South, Frs. Lacombe, Leduc, Gaste, etc., were equally active and successful among the Blackfeet, Alanguin and Montagnais. And far away on the

Pacific Coast, Frs. D'Herbomez, Durieu and other Oblates were regenerating the Indians of the Lower Frazer. Most consoling were the results of their labours. Rev. A. G. Morrice, in an article in the **Catholic Encyclopaedia**, says: "It is doubtful if ever a more thorough change from habitual drunkenness and corrupt morals were effected in North America as that which rejoiced the hearts of the Oblate Fathers in British Columbia."

In 1862 Fr. D'Herbomez was appointed Bishop of New Westminster, an event which gave a new impetus to the evangelization of the great Pacific Province. Shushwaps and Chilcotins were now given the same spiritual advantages in the newly-formed St. Mary's Mission, as the aborigines of the Frazer Valley. Bishop D'Herbomez visited all the North of British Columbia as far as Babine Lake. He was followed by Frs. McGurkin and Lejac, who founded the missions of Kamloops, Babine and Stuarts Lake, destined to become radiant centres of the Faith.

During 1862, Bishop Tache, after a journey of 54 days in the depth of winter—bivouacking for 44 nights in the open prairie, arrived at St. Boniface to find his Cathedral and school burned to the ground. Undeterred by this disaster, he set out for Eastern Canada and Europe to collect funds to erect nobler and more stately buildings upon the ashes of the old.

It may be asked, where did the missionaries get the funds to build schools, churches and hospitals among the impoverished tribes? The answer is, from the Society of the Propagation of the Faith. Were it not for this help the pioneers of the North-west could not accomplish much. It is therefore a great consolation to the faithful who contribute to this Missionary Organization, that they share in the conversion of the pagan.

The time had now come when the Bishop of St. Boniface wished to be relieved of portion of his vast and unwieldy Vicariate. Missions were already established at 2000 miles distance from his headquarters; and with the influx of white immigration, intensive organization was required in the immediate areas of his jurisdiction.

In 1863 the Holy See granted his request for a division of territory. A new Vicariate, that of Athabaska-Mackenzie, was formed, including all the Northern parts of modern Alberta and Saskatchewan, together with the Yukon and North-west territory.

This new Mission field, equal in area to two-thirds of Europe, was entrusted to Bishop Faraud, O.M.I. The new Vicar-Apostolic had already spent 15 years among the Indian tribes. For 10 years he was the spiritual teacher of the Yellowknives, all of whom he saw converted to the Faith. While stationed at Fond du Lac, enduring the trials common to all the early missionaries, he used to walk 150 miles there and back, twice each year, in order to go to Confession to his nearest confrere. Bishop Faraud was singularly endowed for the onerous duties of his far-flung outposts of the Faith. He possessed boundless zeal for souls: a superior intelligence, which gave him a mastery of all the Indian dialects; and herculean strength to surmount the formidable difficulties of the icy solitudes.

As we shall deal later with the peculiar problems of the Mackenzie Vicariate, it may be well here to sketch the careers of a few of the pioneer Oblates, whose labours deserve more than passing mention.



CHAPTER III.

OBLATE PIONEERS

FR. Henry Grollier, a noble son of France, was ordained by the Oblate founder in 1851. In the following year he left sunny Montpellier for the snow and ice of the far North. Assigned to Nativity Mission at Lake Athabaska, he there learned the Montagnais language. Owing to his burning zeal and prodigious apostolic labours he became known as "The Xavier of the North." Like his great Patron he lived for only 12 years as a missionary, but in that period he underwent many hardships and visited

many tribes whom he brought captive to the Faith. He evangelized the Hareskins, Loucheux, Dog-Ribs and Caribou-Eaters. In 1853 he founded the Missions of Fond du Lac and St. Joseph's at Resolution. While labouring here he met with an accident which shortened his life and caused him continual suffering. On a sick-call journey he lost his bearings in the snow. For four days he wandered without food or shelter, until he collapsed unconscious. Providentially he was found by a search party, on the fifth night, nearly frozen to death. Primitive "first aid" and warm food saved his life; but from that day he was afflicted with chronic asthma. Yet this asthmatic missionary never wavered. He preached, catechized, travelled and established the Missions of Fort Simpson and Fort Norman. In 1858 he converted many of the Dog-Rib Indians at Fort Rae, where he erected a humble chapel. During this same year he underwent an "operation" which remained a secret until years after his death. On a journey across the frozen surface of Great Slave Lake, his feet became badly infected. The livid nails only partially adhered to the broken flesh, and they quivered and pained so much that he could walk no further. The afflicted missionary requested Peter, his Indian guide, to remove the nails with pincers. Each separate operation caused much bleeding. As the last nail was coming off, the patient asked for a drink of water, and then thanked his "surgeon"! No wonder Pope Pius IX said to an Oblate missionary from those regions: "You have the reality of martyrdom without the halo."

The heroic Grollier continued his labours for another five years. He founded the famous Mission of Good Hope on the embattled ramparts of the Mackenzie, where for two years he did not see a confrere. Proceeding Northward along the Peel River, he established a station at McPherson for the Loucheux Indians. Here he offered the Holy Sacrifice 300 miles inside the Arctic Circle, and erected a huge Cross overlooking the Polar Sea. He reconciled the Loucheux and Eskimo Tribes, who were at war, inducing the two chiefs to clasp the hands of friendship, beneath the Standard of man's Redemption. In a birch-canoe he made the journey on three occasions, of 600 miles, between McPherson and Good Hope. His residence at this distant outpost was a log-hut through which the rain poured and the fierce north wind blew. His little chapel was of similar design, lighted only with deerskin

windows. As the latter proved tempting morsels for the prowling wolves and dogs, this little chapel at the ends of the earth was frequently windowless.

Without a bed to sleep in; without shelter or nourishment to sustain his emaciated body, the intrepid Fr. Grollier ended his career on May 20th, 1864. His last words were: "O Jesus, I die happy, having seen Thy Standard raised at the extremity of the earth." A small wooden cross marks the resting place, among his Indians, of this first Oblate missionary to die in the Arctic snows.

Fr. Lacombe, a Canadian by birth, joined the Oblate Fathers in 1850. He began his long career as an itinerant missionary in 1852. He gained such an extraordinary in-



Father Lacombe, O.M.I.—"The man of good heart."

fluence over the Indian Tribes, that he became almost a legendary figure, and was affectionately known amongst them as "The Man with the Good Heart." To win the aborigines to the Faith, he not only ministered to them spiritually, but he accompanied them on their hunting expeditions; shared their smoky wigwams; and settled their many feuds. He composed a standard dictionary of the Cree language, and the only material he had to work on was the sound of the words as they were spoken to him. Fr. Lacombe's lifelong object was not only to Christianize the Indians, but to wean them from their roving habits. To this end he tried to teach them to cultivate the soil, setting them an example by his own model farm. His was the first hand to guide a ploughshare through the Southern prairie. He hacked his way through forest primeval, and built a road with many bridges between Fort Garry and Saskatchewan. He explored 1200 miles of swamp and forest and prairie, which became known as the "Lacombe Route," and which was used by the caravans of the Hudson Bay Co. until the opening of the Canadian Pacific Railway. During the construction of the railroad, the enraged Indians would have slaughtered the white workers were it not for the restraining influence of this black-robed missionary. With sugar, flour and tobacco, Fr. Lacombe knew how to humour the native warriors. He explained to them that the whites were only passers-by, and that to compensate them for the loss of the caribous, the new railway would bring them an abundance of the good things of life. Fr. Lacombe was the intermediary between the Government and the Tribes in arranging the Treaties of 1899-1900; and during the abortive Riel Rebellion, had he not restrained the Blackfeet and Montagnais, there would have been a general conflagration. In recognition of his many services in the cause of civilization, the Canadian Government granted many concessions to this valiant missionary of the Western Prairies.

Another outstanding pioneer was the learned Fr. Petiot. Missionary, linguist, explorer, ethnographer, he was for a time assigned to the Crees of Saskatchewan. But his principal labours were amongst the Tinnéh and Loucheux Tribes in the Arctic. He preached the saving name of Jesus to savages who had never heard that Adorable Name. Alone he explored during 12 Polar Winters, the barren lands between the Mackenzie delta and the Alaskan coast. He visited regions that had no name in geography.

He wrote several works on the manners and customs of the Arctic Tribes and on the geological constitution of those regions. His ethnographical books and original maps of the islands of the Frozen Ocean are amongst the most precious treasures of the Geographical Society of Paris.

Bishop Clut, Auxiliary-Bishop of Mackenzie for 36 years, is one of the most colourful figures of the early Church in the Far North. Ordained in 1857, he laboured for nine years at Lake Athabaska. His episcopal appointment is one of the strangest in missionary history. When Bishop Faraud was in Rome in 1864, he requested Pope Pius IX for an auxiliary to help him in his vicariate of such vast territorial dimensions. The Holy Father, fully appreciating the primitive means of communication in that far-flung outpost of the Church, drafted the Bulls in blank for the appointment and consecration of a Bishop. Dr. Faraud was to consult his missionaries and then fill in the name chosen. A unanimous secret ballot elected Fr. Clut. The astonished Bishop-Elect heard the news of his fate nearly two years later, when he was told to prepare for his consecration in 1867. One of the faculties granted to Bishop Faraud, dispensed with the presence of co-consecrating Prelates. So, on August 15th, 1867, Fr. Clut was consecrated Auxiliary Bishop of Athabaska-Mackenzie in the presence of a large gathering of Red Indians, with two Oblate Fathers as his assistant "prelates," and an improvised crosier in his toil-worn hands! The exploits, hardships, and missionary expeditions of this remarkable man form a romantic story of apostolic courage. In August, 1872, in company with Fr. Lecorre, he undertook an adventurous journey through the Yukon and Alaska. The two missionaries carried on their backs their canoe, rations, blankets and "chapel". Walking across the serrated summits of the Rockies, they eventually reached the Porcupine River. As the river was already frozen, the canoe was only an encumbrance; so that part of their equipage was abandoned. After ten weeks' walking they reached Fort Yukon on October 6th. They then travelled down the Yukon River through Alaska to the Behring Sea. Here they baptized 150 Indians, whose good dispositions gave great encouragement for a Mission Foundation. The Bishop left Fr. Lecorre to carry on the good work, while he returned alone by the same route to his distant headquarters at Good Hope—arriving there in September, 1873, just thirteen months after he had started.

Towards the end of the same year Bishop Clut was informed that the Alaskan territory was within the jurisdiction of the Vancouver diocese! So Fr. Lecorre was recalled in 1874. About ten years later the Jesuit Fathers were entrusted with the Vicariate of Alaska.

Bishop Clut lived and died in the Arctic regions. As Dr. Faraud was for many years crippled with sciatica, the Auxiliary carried out the pastoral visitation. It took him four years to encompass the whole Vicariate. This will be readily understood if the reader recalls that the "parishes" were hundreds of miles apart, over an area of 2,000,000 square miles, and the only means of conveyance—episcopal feet, canoe, or dog-team. Bishop Clut knew every river and lake in the Far North, and there were very few of them that did not remind him of hair-breadth escapes during his 46 years as a pioneer missionary in the everlasting snows.

A small wooden cross on the banks of Lesser Slave Lake marks the grave of this episcopal troubadour of the Lord who died in 1903.



CHAPTER IV.

DEVELOPMENTS

BY 1870 the foundations of the Church were securely laid in West and Northern Canada. There were by that time upwards of 40,000 Indian and half-breed Catholics in the Vicariates. While in Rome for the Vatican Council, Bishop Tache was appointed Assistant to the Pontifical Throne by Pope Pius IX. In the following year St. Boniface was raised to the status of an Archbishopric, with Dr. Tache as Metropolitan, and three Oblate Bishops as suffragans: Bishop D'Herbomez (New-Westminster), Faraud (Atha-Mackenzie), and Grandin (St. Albert). With

this perfected organization, the Church entered an era of development.

Archbishop Tache had already played a major role in shaping the destinies of the North-west. As pioneer missionary he had sown the seeds of civilization, and nurtured their rapid growth. As a member of the Government of Assiniboia (now Manitoba), he exhibited courage, wisdom and statesmanship; while in the defence of Religion he was a modern Athanasius.

When the Eastern Provinces went into Federation, Assiniboia was annexed without even consulting the inhabitants. Before the actual transfer had taken place, officials and surveyors of the Ottawa Government arrived, who by their arrogance and disregard for established rights, exasperated the colonists, both white and coloured. The result was open rebellion under the leadership of Louis Riel. To remedy its mistakes and those of its officials, the Federal Government besought Archbishop Tache to intervene. His mediation was successful. The bloodshed ceased, and the Manitoba Act, which met nearly all the demands of the discontented colonists, was passed through Parliament.

But a far greater trial than the Riel Rebellion was in store for the Archbishop of St. Boniface. From the foundation of the colony, an education system prevailed, which was equally fair and satisfactory to both Catholics and Protestants. When, however, the new English settlers had outnumbered the French Canadian Catholics, the legislation and guarantees of 70 years were ignored by the Ascendancy. The rights of the Catholic minority were whittled down, and their membership of the Education Board reduced to three. Finally, a nefarious Act was passed in 1890, which placed all schools under Protestant management.

This gross injustice was fought with characteristic energy and zeal by the Archbishop. In the ensuing campaign he wrote several theses and other works of remarkable vigour and irrefutable logic. Eventually his health broke down, just as the cause which he had championed was decided in his favour by the Privy Council. He continued to labour and linger in great bodily sufferings, until on June 22nd, 1894, mourned by multitudes, he passed to his eternal reward. The first Archbishop of St. Boniface

one of the greatest figures of the Canadian Church, had finished his course. He was succeeded by Archbishop Langevin, O.M.I. (1895-1915).

It would be outside the scope of these pages to detail the phenomenal development which followed the opening in 1885 of the Canadian Pacific Railway. This great scientific achievement was the magic wand which opened up the treasures of the West. It completely transformed the wilderness and gave considerable value to lands hitherto untapped. Wave after wave of white immigration was soon to roll across the soil pioneered by the Oblate missionaries. Towns and cities sprang up where the Indian camp-fires burned, and golden corn enriched the prairies where wild hunters had chased the caribou. The immigrants were pouring in from all parts of the world, bringing with them as many religions as tongues, thus creating new problems for the Church.

In 1886, a few months after the opening of the C.P.R., a Council of Bishops was held at St. Boniface, to draw up plans to meet the changing conditions. For the Church was alive to the danger that out of such a babel of tongues and wild spirit of adventure, a "civilized barbarism" might replace the primitive savagery of the Red Man.

From the statistics published on this occasion, we get some idea of the herculean labours of the pioneers. Before the first train steamed across the prairies in 1885, there were in the North-west 6 Bishops, 127 Priests, 168 Churches and 132 Schools. The number of souls regenerated in the saving waters of Baptism was close on 80,000. This remarkable achievement in 40 years, in the most primitive conditions imaginable, was by the grace of God, almost entirely the work of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

What sacrifices, hardships, toils and casualties were involved in that missionary story! At least 12 Oblate Fathers were drowned in the treacherous rivers and lakes. Three were frozen to death in the Arctic blizzards. One was killed and eaten by an Iroquois Indian. Two were shot dead during the Riel Rebellion, and seven missions completely destroyed. Another, endeavouring to catch a few fish in a hole in the ice, was overcome by the cold. His numb body fell into the hole he had made, and there it remained completely frozen and preserved—a permanent shrine for his brother missionaries who had to face the

same dangers. Snow-blindness, frost-bite and starvation left their permanent scars on the face and hands and feet of many of these soldiers of Christ. Not one of them was a stranger to the pangs of hunger. Six or seven days without food in the frozen wilderness has made some of them so desperate, that they have had as a last resort, to eat their deerskin shoes or a wolf killed by a poisoned arrow.

Meanwhile the scene is changing all along the South. Civilization marches on. Original Vicariates are dismembered, and new dioceses formed. Edmonton, Calgary and Regina replace St. Albert. Fort Garry grows into the city of Winnipeg. The See of New-Westminster is transferred to Vancouver and becomes an Archbishopric. As the southern dioceses become developed and modernized, they gradually lose their missionary role, whereas the Northern Vicariates were to remain for long the arenas of apostolic heroism. The Oblates, although still remaining the most considerable body of priests in the new dioceses, were gradually replaced by the parochial clergy. But in the Vicariates of the North they remained, and still remain until to-day, the sole apostles of the Faith.

Fr. Daly, a distinguished Redemptorist, reviewing the apostolate of the North-west in his book, **Catholic Problems in Western Canada**, in 1921 wrote: "The Oblate Fathers lived and died with the wandering children of the prairie. They kept the Faith burning from the shores of the St. Lawrence to the everlasting Arctic snows. Their heroic lives furnish a bright splash upon the drab and bleak landscape of the North-west Territories. The Church in Canada will ever remain indebted to those noble pioneers of the Cross—Apostolic Bishops and Priests of the first hour. Their saintly lives are forever emblazoned on Canadian history. The Western trails murmur their names in gratitude, and the Indians still bless their memory by the dying fires of their camps."



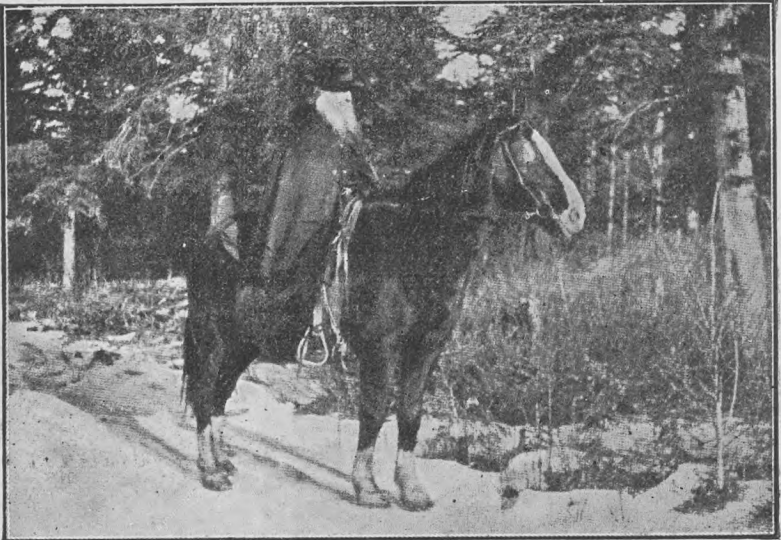
CHAPTER V.

ARCTIC MISSIONS

OF the eight Vicariates-Apostolic entrusted to the Oblate Missionaries in the Far North, two of them deserve special mention, namely, those of Mackenzie and Hudson Bay. For situated in the Arctic regions they are the coldest, the poorest, the most sparsely populated, and the most difficult of all the Mission fields of the Church.

As we have already seen, the original Atha-Mackenzie was a territory of continental dimensions. Even after it was dismembered on the South, West and East, it still embraced an area of half a million square miles.

The versatile Bishop Grouard succeeded Dr. Faraud in this Arctic field of labour in 1890. Beginning his missionary career in 1862, he laboured for 28 years throughout the Mackenzie and in Northern British Columbia. During two years enforced inactivity owing to illness, he learned painting and printing, which he turned to good account in



Bishop Grouard, O.M.I.

after years. He became in turn preacher, catechist, author, printer, compositor and painter. Some of his highly creditable paintings adorn the churches of the North. He wrote and printed several small books on the Scriptures; also hymn and prayer-books in five Indian dialects. He stayed long enough with the Eskimos at the Frozen Ocean to learn their language and write hymns for them. Already a veteran of 28 missionary years, he was consecrated Bishop in 1890, taking as his motto the one word, "Excelsior." Strangely appropriate this ideal proved amid snow and ice. We are told that this valiant traveller in the cause of the Lord, walked 4000 miles in two years! In addition to his other attainments he became mendicant and builder. New institutions sprang up under his guiding hand. The silent solitudes of Athabaska reverberated with the sounds of his sawmills and steamboats; and the nomad Indians were astounded at the new devices of their "Chief of Prayer."

When Athabaska was detached from Mackenzie in 1899, Bishop Grouard was appointed to the new diocese. He lived to the patriarchal age of 91, nearly 70 years a missionary and 41 years a Bishop. Even before his death, the Holy See changed the name of the Vicariate to that of "Grouard" in memory of this venerable Patriarch of the Northern Missions.

The Land of the Midnight Sun and the Midday Night.

Throughout our Arctic Vicariates the winter lasts for over nine months of the year, during which the temperature drops to 50 degrees below zero, i.e., over 80 degrees of frost. We who have only experienced a "nip in the air," fail to picture the inconveniences which accompany such cold. When we are informed that tea freezes as it is drunk, and that a knife burns the flesh it touches, we are only introduced to the Arctic climate.

For over two months of winter, the sun disappears completely from the heavens, and the inhabitants of those regions are enveloped in their long and dismal Polar Night. Can we imagine a greater misfortune in Nature than the total disappearance of the sun? This heavenly orb gives colour to the flower, softness to the soil, potency to the seed, ripeness to the grain, light and warmth and life to all things of Nature. Without the solar heat, this earth would be a sterile mass of barren rock and desolate

ice. That is just what the Arctic regions are during their 1800 hours of continuous night. All those over whom this curtain of darkness falls in the Polar areas, long intensely for the sun. And when the first feeble rays begin to pierce the darkness, they are ready to fall upon their knees and thank God for the long-wished-for dawning of the day.

By way of contrast, and as if to compensate for the long winter night, when summer comes, the sun never sets for as many weeks and months as it was hidden previously. Continuous day reigns throughout the Northern Latitudes. This land of the midnight sun remains as bright throughout the "night" as at the noonday splendour. During this short but welcome summer, weird things happen in the Far North. Wildflowers bloom and die in 24 hours. Butterflies appear from nowhere on the wing. Herds of reindeer with spade-like antlers invade the prairies; and mosquitoes rise in swarms to make life a torment stinging even through buckskin gloves.

This is the season for filling the Arctic larder. Hunting and fishing are pleasant occupations when undertaken for recreation; but here they are a question of life or death. If sufficient supplies of fish and deer-flesh are not piled up for the long Polar Winter, then the only alternative to starvation is the desperate gamble for a few snow-hares or fish caught beneath three feet of ice.

The missionaries may have as many as 100 or 150 orphans or aged people depending upon them. To feed such a number during nine months of Winter, 30,000 fish would be required that every one may get a little. Then the dogs, Man's indispensable companions in the snow and ice, must get their portion. These huskies, provided they are well-fed, are faithful and hard-working. They make nothing of the cold—and will roll about in the snow as luxuriantly as young holiday-makers on the hot sands of Sydney beaches. To feed two teams (16 dogs) no less than 100 seals and 35,000 lbs. of fish will be required for the Winter. Hence the short, fleeting summer, means toil and industry without ceasing, in order to procure the bare necessities of life.

The Eskimos.

Who are the inhabitants of the barren Arctic lands? The Eskimos or "Eaters of Raw Meat," and the heroic missionaries who have penetrated there to Christianize

those abandoned people. The Mongolian features of the Eskimo strongly suggest Asiatic origin. As the Aleutian Islands form a kind of stepping stones between Asia and North America, and as the name "Aleutian" is an Eskimo word meaning "the way by which we came," it would seem that the ancestors of this race long ago engaged in an island-hopping expedition from the Old Continent to the New.

The Eskimos are of medium stature, strongly built, with round heads, flat faces, high cheek bones, and narrow slit-like eyes that shine with snake-like brilliancy. Their complexions are a dusty brown. They are intelligent and resourceful, expert hunters and boatmen. The fact that they can live in such a wilderness is proof of their skill and resourcefulness.

Life in the friendless wastes has given them iron determination. They can be as hard as the ice-bound soil on which they roam, and as cruel and treacherous as the fierce North Wind which sweeps across their treeless solitudes. The Eskimo language is a finely developed one, capable of expressing the most delicate shades of meaning by variations in the forms of their words. Prepositions,



An Eskimo couple in their Igloo.

adverbs and conjunctions have no separate existence, as they are incorporated in the declensions and conjugations. Some Eskimo words have as many as 50 syllables, which express the equivalent of nine or ten words in English. It takes years to acquire a mastery of this language.

For nine months out of every twelve the Eskimos live in conical shaped snow-houses called igloos. With their long knives they cut the frozen snow into large wedge-like slabs. They are piled in successive layers in circular form, the narrow edges dipping inwards like the stones of an arch. Finally a cork-like keystone is inserted in the top. The separate blocks soon knit together firmly, so that the finished building is capable of sustaining the weight of an average man. Around the interior of this "house" is a circular bench, cut out of snow, on which are spread all available furs. On this they sit and sleep and smoke the pipe of peace. And on the long Winter's night they regale each other with a rich folklore which fosters racial unity.

A soapstone lamp, filled with fish-oil and fitted with a moss-wick, is kept constantly lighted. This contrivance exhales a most rancid odour, to which a civilized nose never becomes reconciled. And when the unwashed Eskimos crowd the greasy interior of the unventilated igloo, the place becomes so malodorous that "nasal martyrdom" is added to the poor missionary's litany of trials.

Stoves cannot be used in the Eskimo villa, for even if they had fuel, the snow-house would melt from artificial heat. It takes from three to four hours to boil the thawed snow for tea, and five to six hours even partially to cook fish or meat on the soapstone lamp. Hence it is no wonder that the Eskimos are eaters of raw meat! They have developed a depraved sense of taste, and will eat their raw food however "high and ancient" with full gastronomic satisfaction!

Eskimo—Religion and Morality.

The Eskimos have a vague idea of a Supreme Being, and are constantly troubled by the spirit-world which surrounds them. To placate the spirits and make them kindly disposed towards them, certain prescribed ceremonies are carried out. Their various taboos are enforced with heavy penalties. They will not dare to offend the evil spirits. Sorcery and magic play a big part in their lives.

The Eskimo, as long as he remains pagan, has all the savage disregard for morality. He is a great liar, skilled in the art of deceiving. "There is no art to find the mind's construction" in his sphinx-like features. All kinds of indecency are found in the lives of this unhappy people. They frequently abandon their children who are born during the summer; and in seasons of great scarcity, they do not stop at murder and cannibalism to satisfy their needs.

Sorcery, magic, immorality, were the formidable barriers that had to be overcome before these unfortunate people accepted the Gospel. Miracles of Grace had to be accomplished—untold sacrifices had to be made by the missionaries, before this abandoned race was—drawn out of the abysmal darkness of Arctic paganism. Attempts were made by the Oblate Fathers to convert this pagan race at five different points in the Arctic, viz., Hudson Bay, Labrador, Coronation Gulf, Northern Alaska, and at Mackenzie Mouth. But practically every attempt ended in failure. The Eskimos still continued stoical, indifferent, apathetic. They listened to the missionaries' instructions as to so many fairy-tales, and remained as solidly embedded in paganism as their frozen seas. It was only after the lives of three gallant missionaries had been sacrificed in their cause, that the first spiritual harvest was reaped among those wanderers of the Arctic.

Massacre of Two Missionaries.

Bishop Breynat was appointed Vicar-Apostolic of Macenzie in 1900. From the very outset he cherished the idea of a concentrated attack on Eskimo paganism. For this purpose he set aside two young zealous missionaries—Frs. Rouviere and Le Roux. They learned the Eskimo language and prepared for their perilous and extremely difficult task. In 1912, bringing with them a portable "chapel," some tools and rations, they set out from Fort Norman on the Mackenzie to the Coppermine River, where, it was reported, some Eskimos were camping. It had been a lean year. Fishing had yielded poor returns, and the caribou had kept mysteriously away. The spectre of starvation haunted that part of the Arctic. The missionaries built a little cabin at Immenerick among the poor sapless firs of that truly barren land. Here they spent the Winter, but only met a few families. They, therefore,



Father Le Roux, O.M.I.

decided that if they were to succeed, they would have to follow the wanderers and live with them. They set out in 1913 for the Coppermine Basin, 200 miles further North on the Frozen Ocean.

The reception the missionaries were accorded was not very encouraging. Their provisions were stolen from the tent where they were sheltering, and Fr. Le Roux's rifle was also removed by a member of the tribe named Kormik. Now for a stranger to be without a hunting rifle in the Arctic means certain death from starvation. So the young priest recovered his gun with physical force. This enraged the savage thief. An old tribesman named Koeha who knew his people, scented danger for the white men if they stayed on; he therefore advised them to leave. He even accompanied them part of their journey, and told them to return the following year. In the meantime, two of Kormik's friends, Sinnisiak and Oulooksak, had slipped away from the camp and were following the tracks of the missionaries in the snow. When they had eventually caught

up, the cunning fellows pretended to be helpful. They even helped to build an igloo for the night. But, during a snow-storm on the following day, they fell upon the missionaries and stabbed them both to death. The two monsters cut off the priests' heads and legs with an axe; then slit open their bodies, tore out their livers and ate them. They afterwards returned to camp, saying: "We have slain the white men." The two murdered missionaries were aged 32 and 27 respectively. Many thousands of miles from their sunny native land, they had penetrated the icy wastes of the North to bring the Gospel of salvation to an abandoned race. In October, 1913, while their generous hearts were pulsating with zeal for their Master's glory, their young lives were taken by the people whom they were trying to serve.

In the designs of Providence, however, that blood-shedding was soon to thaw the frozen furrows of the Arctic, and sow in them the seeds of a spiritual harvest. The conversion of the Eskimo was beginning at two different points, namely, Coronation Gulf and Chesterfield Inlet. But before the first harvest was actually reaped, another missionary's life was to be sacrificed in the cause.

The priests of the Arctic Vicariates must necessarily be heroes. Conditions of life leave no alternative. They shrink not from filthy igloo, rigorous climate, depraved savage, or danger to life and limb. Hence we are not surprised to learn that all the missionaries of the Mackenzie volunteered to replace their murdered confreres. But the two chosen by Bishop Breynat, were Frs. Falaize and Frapsauce. Within a few months of his arrival at the Coppermine Basin, the latter was posted "missing." After a day's search his confrere traced his tracks and those of his dog-team to a hole in the ice, where he had gone down—drowned while attempting to get fish to replenish his empty larder.

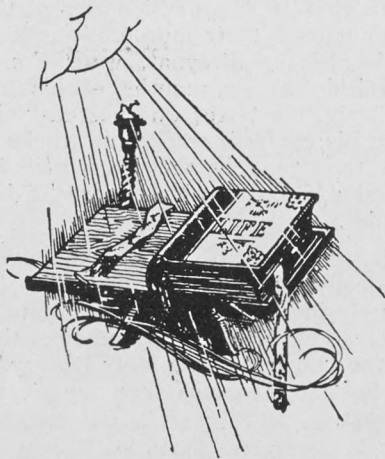
During the 30 years that have elapsed since that tragedy, the conversion of the Eskimos has gone on slowly but surely in the Mackenzie Vicariate. In 1920 the first permanent chapel was opened for them. It was dedicated to the "Queen of the Holy Rosary." Since then, seven other Eskimo Missions have been established on the Arctic Coast.

Bishop Breynat's most recent report on his "diocese" reveals some interesting figures. The total population

(Indian and Eskimo) in 1946 was 11,600 souls. Of these, 9,800 are Catholics. Forty-eight Oblate Fathers labour in the scattered missions over an area of half a million square miles. Among the "unknown apostles" of this formidable field of labour are 42 lay-brothers and 76 valiant Grey Sisters, who conduct 13 Schools, 4 Orphanages, 7 Hospitals and 5 Dispensaries, under conditions that call for continual heroism. The first brick building of the Vicariate is now being erected !

Bishop Breynat's account of his flock is very encouraging. He states that the Loucheux Indians form a model "parish," with many frequent and daily communicants. The Eskimo Catholics are proving as strong in the Faith as they were formerly in their pagan rites. Two students (one Indian and one Eskimo) are studying for the priesthood in an Oblate Seminary in Southern Canada.

Since 1936, the discovery of copper, uranium and petrol at Yellowknife in the Sub-Arctic, has attracted a number of white miners to that area. No doubt, this settlement will gradually develop into a "boom-town." Whether this impact with civilization will improve the peoples of the Far North, future history will record.



CHAPTER VI.

ARCTIC HEROES

THE late Pope Pius XI, in an audience with Bishop Turquetil, O.M.I., in 1934, said: "If it were possible for me to visit one of the far-flung Missions of the Church, I would choose that of Hudson Bay." The great Pope of the Missions, himself an intrepid mountain climber in his youth, knew what constitutes bravery. He was fully informed on all the apostolic labours of his priests throughout the world. Yet he was convinced that the theatre which demanded most sacrifice, and entailed the greatest hardships, was the territory entrusted to the Oblate Missionaries in the Arctic Vicariate of Hudson Bay.

Colder and even more barren than Mackenzie — absolutely devoid of all local resources—this vast field of labour covers an area of 1,600,000 square miles. Bounded on the South by the 60th degree latitude and on the North by the geographic North Pole, it extends from the coast of Labrador in the East, to the 101st degree longitude in the western mainland. In that sterile wilderness no tree grows; no flowers bloom—no vegetation gladdens the eye. It is a barren and frozen wilderness of interminable snow and ice. The inhabitants are about 7000 Eskimos of no fixed abode.

To convert those poor benighted nomads is the object of the Oblate missionaries, who are the front-line soldiers along the Arctic front.

In 1910 all this territory was in the Vicariate of Kewatin, under Bishop Charlebois, O.M.I. When you realize that his headquarters were at Le Pas, on the southern fringe of civilization, you can imagine the hopeless task confronting him if he were to try and reach all parts of that vast domain. That the southern or civilized parts of his Vicariate kept this great missionary Bishop busy, is evidenced by an account he gave of a four months' pastoral visitation which he made in 1911. "I travelled," he wrote, "300 miles by train; 80 miles in a carriage without springs; 2000 miles in canoes; and 60 miles on foot. I slept on the ground 61 nights in the shelter of a little tent, wherein I celebrated Mass each day. I visited 14 mission stations with 4500 Catholics. I preached seven

ST. THOMAS COLLEGE

LIBRARY

Retreats, and confirmed 1155 Indians, whose good dispositions edified me more than a little."

A young missionary began his career in Kewatin in 1900, who was to become the modern apostle of the Eskimos in the Hudson Bay territories. This was Fr. Turquetil. He first contacted the Eskimos near Chesterfield Inlet in 1906. So confident was he of success that he opened a mission entitled "Our Lady of Deliverance." But it was not for several years afterwards that his optimism was justified. Difficulties of a formidable kind beset his path from the very outset. He was the first white man to visit the Eskimo country. They were suspicious, aloof and even hostile. Fr. Turquetil was aware of the fate which befell explorers among the tribes of this treacherous race in other parts of the Arctic. His next difficulty was to keep contact with them. Their camps were hundreds of miles apart, constantly changing location, some of them with only a few hunters. He once travelled 900 miles and only saw 14 people. The Eskimo is a nomad by necessity. Depending for the clothes he wears and the food he eats, upon hunting and fishing expeditions, he is constantly breaking camp to follow the chase.

Fr. Turquetil decided to accompany the Eskimos to their distant hunting fields—to share their precarious mode of life—to learn their language, and acquire an influence over them. For four years he lived like an Eskimo, mushing through the snowy wilderness—enduring incredible hardships; cut away from civilization, except for the visit once a year of a solitary boat, the ice-breaker, **Nascopie**. Yet after all his hardships and sacrifices, there was not a single convert to record.

This is one of the heart-breaking features of the Arctic missions. In other lands among the heathen races, the harvest is great. Millions await conversion—and the missionaries have the consolation of gathering immense harvests into the granaries of God. But in the Polar regions, the territory is large, but the harvest is small, and extremely slow to ripen. From this point of view it requires all the strong Faith of the missionary to prevent him from being despondent.

In 1912 Fr. Turquetil had his first success, which he attributes to the intercession of St. Therese. Three adults asked to be baptized. Slowly the work of conversion went

on. Other Oblates were sent to this field of labour, and a number of mission stations were opened.

In 1925 these missions were erected into a Prefecture, with Fr. Turquetil as the logical choice as Director. Six years later he was nominated Vicar-Apostolic, and consecrated Bishop of the Hudson Bay territories.

It is now over 30 years since Bishop Turquetil launched his Eskimo campaign at Chesterfield Inlet. During that period, in spite of Arctic conditions—lack of means of communication; and the barriers of a stoical, apathetic Eskimo paganism—31 missions have been opened, 17 of them with resident priest, throughout those vast icy regions. Two thousand Eskimo Catholics are now practising devoutly our holy Faith in their houses of snow.

“Parish Priest of the North Pole.”

This title is the unique distinction of Fr. Danielo, O.M.I., of the Hudson Bay Vicariate, who shares with one confrere, the spiritual guidance of the barren wilderness of Baffin Land. The two missionaries occupy the North



Bishop Turquetil, O.M.I.

and South of that immense "parish," and are 800 miles apart. Cape Dorset, on the South, is entrusted to Fr. Trebaol, O.M.I., who works in temperatures of 60 degrees below zero.

Pond Inlet, the headquarters of Fr. Danielo, is dedicated to the Sacred Heart. This gallant soldier of Christ has spent 12 years with the Eskimos in the Polar "Never Never." His chapel-of-ease is at Arctic Bay, 120 miles to the North-west. This chapel, dedicated to Christ the King, is the most northerly Catholic mission of the globe, and the nearest Eucharistic Tabernacle to the North Pole. Even the Eskimos consider this the limit of their wanderings. Beyond Arctic Bay there is no human being, and the only sound that breaks the great white silence is the growl of a grizzly bear.

Baffin Land has about 1800 Eskimos, as deeply rooted in paganism as the frozen seas, which surround their sterile coasts. The poor Pastor has only 20 Catholics in his neighbourhood, although this mission was founded 18 years ago. It is true, there have been 100 people baptized there, but most of these are now further south at the mission of Iglulik. So the Pastor of the North Pole has often to say Mass alone in his little chapel, which is enveloped for nearly three months each year in the complete darkness of a long Arctic night. He is not troubled much by visitors. The ice-breaker, **Nascopie**, calls once a year, unloads provisions, and after 24 hours, departs. In order to perform his Easter Duty like every good Catholic, he has to walk 600 miles return journey to his nearest confrere at Iglulik! Human consolations he has none. And if we measure spiritual consolations in terms of converts to the Faith, he has very few. Baffin Land is completely sterile. There is no landmark to guide the missionary through the frozen labyrinth as he journeys after the nomad tribes. There is no shelter against the biting North Wind. No fire can be kindled. In order to see a tree, one would have to travel 1500 miles.

The mission of Pond Inlet was opened in 1929, by Frs. P. Girard and E. Basin. The material for the little church was brought 2000 miles by the **Nascopie**; and the crew of the boat helped the missionaries to erect the building. A huge Cross, also brought on the **Nascopie**, was erected on a neighbouring hill, 800 miles inside the Arctic Circle. This towering reminder of man's Redemption dominates

the whole area, and marks the furthest outpost of the earthly Kingdom of Christ.

The Value of One Soul.

To human eyes, the presence of a missionary in such a desolate outpost as Pond Inlet seems sheer folly; and since so few conversions are recorded annually, one might be tempted to argue that such brave priests would be better occupied in lands with millions to be saved. But the missionaries of the Arctic are guided by Eternal values. Without these ministers of God, the Eskimos would be abandoned. Hence the Oblate Fathers remain at their Arctic posts until the last savage is brought captive to the Faith. As Pope Pius XI said to Fr. Girard, first missionary at Pond Inlet: "If there was only one Eskimo family this side of the Pole, and it took you two years to reach them, I would say, Go to them, for they have a right to Redemption."

Trials and Hardships in the Arctic.

Formidable hardships are the inevitable lot of the missionaries of Hudson Bay Vicariate. These come chiefly from Cold, Hunger, Poverty and Loneliness. The pampered child of civilization can scarcely understand what it means to continue working and to stay cheerful when the temperature drops to unthinkable levels below zero. There are missionaries in the desolate Arctic who have no stoves in their huts, although exposed to temperatures of 60 to 70 degrees below zero. He who has never come to the actual point of starvation, knows not what real hunger means. An Oblate missionary of the Far North prayed for three years for bread. When at last he and his two companions were given a few loaves, they ate the dry bread with tears of gratitude in their eyes.

Bishop Turquetil and his missionaries have become inured to their limitations of diet, and have often been faced with starvation. The Bishop and a fellow-priest were once five days without food. The severest cold had, however, passed, and they were able to trudge along wearily. Suddenly they heard the sound of running water from an ice-encrusted fall. With their last ounce of

strength they managed to spread a little net and catch two fish. So ravenously hungry were they, that they ate the fish alive.

The missions of Hudson Bay have poverty stamped upon them. Lack of all local resources and immense distances from civilization, contribute to make the Arctic missions the poorest in the world. Pelly Bay, for example, is situated on the frozen sea, near the Magnetic Pole. The two missionaries who labour there are housed in a one-roomed house which serves as kitchen, dormitory and chapel. No ship or ice-breaker has ever been able to reach this point. All supplies must be borne by dog-sled from Repulse Bay, 300 miles away. The daily menu of these two missionaries is fish—morning, noon and evening. They have no bread, butter, vegetables, and rarely meat. Yet these soldiers of the Lord have to make tremendous journeys through King William Island and Bothnia Peninsula to keep contact with their Eskimo "parishioners."

For some of the missionaries the greatest trial is the loneliness of the bare walls of their hut in the wilderness. With no newspaper, telephone or wireless—their nearest confrere 300 miles away through the trackless snows—those naturally gregarious men feel the weird loneliness of the icy solitudes above all their hardships.

Some of the problems faced by the missionaries of the desolate North are outlined in the following letter written by Fr. Basin to Bishop Turquetil, and which reached its destination 13 months after it was written:—

"The Island of Alvajak,

July 24th, 1933.

"Most Rev. and Beloved Bishop,

"Our little settlement here has suffered a most severe trial. Yesterday morning when I had just finished Holy Mass, our church was burned to the ground. Nothing is now left of it. I was able to save only the Blessed Sacrament—three small Hosts in a pyx. Beyond the clothes I am wearing I have absolutely nothing left. All the labours, sacrifices and sufferings of three years were wiped out in a few moments. May the Lord forgive me my faults and save the Eskimos! I have neither a breviary nor the necessary equipment for Mass. It is indeed a great sorrow to

be deprived of Holy Mass and the breviary for so long a time. The little pyx, with the three consecrated Hosts, is carried on my breast. So I am at least able to visit the Blessed Sacrament and receive Holy Communion on the greater Feast Days. How can I help if this is not in accordance with liturgical rules? I shall have to hold out like this for seven or eight months . . .

“August 25th.

“Providence has come to my aid. With a few charred pieces of wood I have built a miniature cabin. Its floor and walls are made of walrus skin—the ‘windows’ are walrus guts dried. Next year I hope to make an extension . . .

“Sometimes a craving comes for a cup of tea. Then I boil a pot of water; think intensely about the taste of tea or coffee—close my eyes to help the flight of fancy, and swallow the water! At other times I have a hankering for what civilized people call a decent meal. So I cook half a dozen of the dried beans, dug out of the ashes after our disastrous fire, and say, ‘Now do penance for your youthful gluttony.’

“Last year there was a famine here, and the Eskimos had to eat walrus carcasses which had been lying on the ground for three years! Now a few words about the spiritual life of the Eskimos. They keep coming for instruction every Sunday, but I am sorry we cannot have Mass. The young are easy to instruct, though they have an extraordinary facility for forgetting. The old are more difficult to handle, even when they show the best of dispositions. They are self-taught and were formulating their own strange forms of Christianity before we arrived amongst them . . . I expect to receive my 1931-32 mail when I return to this station in 1934. In the meantime, if orders should come for me to go elsewhere, I will not receive that mail before 1935-36. My great wish at present is to see the Mission-steamer, **Pius XI**, come to Alvajak. We could then receive our supplies every two or three years! Most of all, the Eskimos would rejoice to see the boat named after the ‘Pope of the Missions’ here at 70 degrees north latitude. It would strengthen the Faith of our neophytes, and help to convert the pagans.

“I now close my report, Most Rev. and Beloved Bishop,

with deep gratitude and devotion, begging at the same time your prayers and Blessing.

“Etienne Basin, O.M.I.”

Such, gentle readers, are the trials, and such is the calibre of the missionaries who are to-day evangelizing the Eskimos in the snow-bound territories of Hudson Bay Vicariate. Thirty-two Oblates man the scattered outposts from Churchill to Arctic Bay, forming the spearhead of advancing Faith into Arctic paganism. Assisting the Oblate missionaries is a community of Grey Nuns at Chesterfield Inlet. These valiant women conduct a spotless hospital, which is like a blooming oasis in the bleak desert of snow. Their courageous endurance of rigorous weather conditions and other hardships would put strong men to shame.

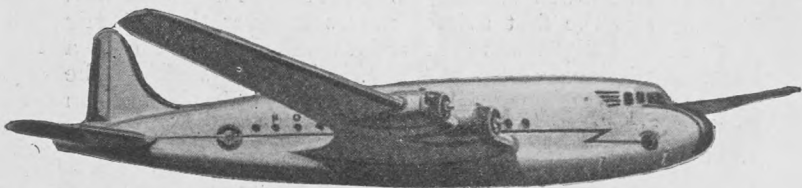


Mary Immaculate—Pray for us.

CHAPTER VII.

MODERN TRANSPORT

THE missionary association called Miva was founded in 1927 by a German Oblate, Fr. Paul Schulte. An aviator in World War I, he studied for the priesthood at the conclusion of hostilities, and was ordained in 1923. His closest friend in civil life, and subsequently his confrere in Religion, Fr. Fuhrman, O.M.I., lost his life on a missionary journey in West Africa. Smitten by a serious illness, the young priest was carried by natives for three days, until he collapsed and died upon the sands of Okavango. This tragedy grieved the heart of Fr. Schulte. Had an aeroplane or automobile been available, his friend's life could have been saved. Why not found an Association to supply the distant mission-fields with modern means of transport! What time and precious human lives could be saved! Thus was the idea of "Miva" conceived. Fr. Schulte's plan was approved by his superiors, and when the scheme was submitted to Pope Pius XI, the Holy Father gave the venture his paternal blessing.



In 1927 the **Missions-Verkehrs-Arbeitsgemeinschaft**, or Missionary Vehicular Association, was launched in Germany. Fr. Schulte flew from city to city, enlisting support and enrolling members. He crossed to America, where he was warmly received and generously helped. In two years he had enrolled 100,000 members in his Association. He himself volunteered for West Africa, where he taught the Oblate missionaries to fly one of his Miva machines.

By 1932 this Association had supplied modern means of transport to missions in many parts of the world, including New Guinea, the Solomons and the Kimberley

Vicariate in North-west Australia. In 1935 Fr. Schulte again made history by saying Mass, with the Pope's special permission, on board the Graf-Zeppelin on its maiden flight across the Atlantic—the first time Holy Mass was celebrated in the air.

In 1936 the founder of the Miva is in the Vicariates of Hudson and James Bay, pioneering flights over the Arctic. He made many Mercy-Flights in those regions—the most adventurous and spectacular being the rescue of Fr. Cochard, O.M.I., from death's door in his hut at Arctic Bay Mission. An S.O.S. reached Bishop Turquetil that the poor missionary was lying critically ill with a temperature of 105°. Fr. Schulte was immediately contacted. Luckily he had despatched two barrels of gasoline nine months previously to Iglulik, 300 miles south of Arctic Bay.

The flying missionary took off from Churchill in the Flying Cross on his 2200 miles' trip into the Arctic. Over snow-covered lands and frozen seas; over the pack-ice of Fury and Hecla Straits, where a forced landing would have been disastrous, he landed at Arctic Bay as the Midnight Sun was shining through the thin clouds. Fr. Schulte was the first aviator ever seen over these Arctic regions. His flight was a hazardous one, but the life of a brother missionary was at stake. His heart sank on the last stage as he lowered his machine towards the mission flanked on either side by mountainous glaciers and scattered icebergs like cyclopean ramparts of masonry.

Fortunately he was in time: the patient was still alive. Fr. Schulte gave him an orange—the first the sick missionary had seen in his four years in the Arctic. Aided by the Eskimos, and the mechanic (Bro. Bedouin), Fr. Cochard was carefully put on the plane. Taking the consecrated Hosts out of the little Tabernacle and placing the pyx on his breast, the flying priest set out on his return journey. A proud moment for the founder of the Miva. He was carrying the Blessed Sacrament from a tent at Arctic Bay to the Church at Iglulik—the Arctic sun his sanctuary lamp; his aeroplane a tabernacle, and his feverish confrere, the adoring angel.

The return flight was successfully carried out, and the sick missionary under medical care was gradually brought

back to health at Chesterfield Inlet. Fr. Schulte, for his intrepid flight, received a message of congratulation from the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII—more precious to him than Victoria Cross or Legion of Honour.

Thanks to the Miva Association and friends in America, Fr. Schulte was able in three years—1936-39—to supply the Vicariates of Hudson and James Bay with two aeroplanes, 15 radio stations, and 15 bases for gasoline as far as 900 miles north of the Arctic Circle.

Thus advantages, hitherto undreamed of, have been brought to those distant missionary outposts, to cheer and brighten the lives of the Apostles of the Frozen North.

Apostolic Delegate Visits Polar Missions.

An event of great importance to the Arctic Missions was the official visitation in 1939 by Archbishop Antoniutti, Apostolic Delegate to Canada. In undertaking this task His Excellency was carrying out the express wishes of the Sovereign Pontiff, who said to the Delegate on the day of his appointment: "My Dear Son, try to visit the Indian Missions of the Far North. We would be very happy to see even one of them. Since We cannot even do this, We desire that you make the visitation in Our name."

The Apostolic Delegate travelled by a special plane, during the Summer months of July and August. He visited 86 Eskimo and Indian Missions conducted by the Oblate Fathers in the Mackenzie, Yukon and Hudson Bay Vicariates. He personally presented a medal to each of the 9500 Catholics he met, in the name of the Holy Father. The entire tour covered 18,000 miles.

Back in Quebec towards the end of September, His Excellency was pleased to give his impressions in a report to **L'Action Catholique**—"My tour," he said, "was a pilgrimage of love and recognition to those apostles, mostly unknown, who have so nobly served the Church and civilization by their heroic lives. Before starting out on this pilgrimage I knelt at the tomb of the holy missionary Bishop, Dr. Grandin, in the historic St. Albert. Over the treacherous rapids where several have been drowned, over

the desert solitudes where others have been martyred, my thoughts were in deep communion with the spirits of those brave soldiers of Christ, to whom I gave the palm of victory on behalf of the Supreme Pontiff.

"The night I arrived at 1 a.m., the sun still shining brightly in the Arctic sky, at the poor mission of Arctic Bay, most northerly outpost of the Church, I embraced the Oblate missionary, who in the bleak solitude of the Polar snows, devotes his life to the abandoned Eskimo. Deeply touched, I said to him: 'I have come into this desert land to see your virtue and your glory'—words which can be applied to all missionaries of the Far North. For great virtues, burning zeal; generous hearts attuned to every sacrifice, are necessary to a life so difficult and so severe. And I saw, too, the glory of these missionaries! For they have built churches, schools and hospitals at the cost of tremendous sacrifice; and established splendid Catholic communities, to whom they brought the light of the Gospel and the treasures of Christian civilization. With the flame of their apostolic zeal they have thawed and tilled the icy furrows of this land which already belonged to God. This spiritual conquest is a shining glory for these heroes of the Faith.

"I have stated during this Visitation, that Pope Pius XI well defined the role of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, when he called them 'The Specialists in the most difficult Missions.' I have seen the Mission fields of China, the Indies and Africa, but nowhere have I found such difficulties as in the Missions of Northern Canada. They are the unique glory of the Oblate Congregation and the honour of the Church."

This remarkable tribute from the Representative of the Holy Father should prove a great consolation to the missionaries, and a stimulus to further conquests.



EPILOGUE

The Oblate missionaries began their labours in North and Western Canada in 1845. There were then in that vast territory only one Bishop and six priests. To-day, in the same area, there are 6 ecclesiastical provinces, 17 bishoprics, and 1300 priests. The Oblates, as we have seen, were the pioneer Bishops and priests in that great spiritual conquest. They have given to the Church in Canada 32 Missionary Bishops, one of whom became a Prince of the Church—namely, the late Cardinal Villeneuve of Quebec.

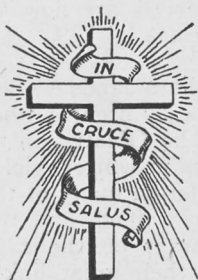
After the opening of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the fertile southern lands, caressed by the mild currents from the Gulfs of Mexico and California, were rapidly peopled by white immigrants, and abandoned by the Indians. The latter, more or less satisfied, on Government guarantees, to give up their liberty and ancient hunting-grounds for the enclosure of Reserved, are now only awaiting the extinction of their tribes.

The civilized southern lands were gradually developed into the comparative easy organization of modern dioceses for the white race. The Oblates, in these parts, although still retaining religious provinces, yielded at the appointed time, to the secular clergy, many of the churches they had built, the soil they had tilled, and the harvests they had sown. Such must always be the case with pioneers. In the South, therefore, their great link with the past, is to supervise and spiritually assist the decaying remnants of ancient Indian Nations. This is happening in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

But no civilization has yet tamed the wild, arid regions of the Far North. There can still be seen, in their primitive modes of life, the tribes of the proud Dene Nation, the Algonquin Crees and the Eskimos. Eight Oblate Bishops and over 400 missionaries in the Vicariates of Prince Rupert, Whitehorse, Mackenzie, Grouard, Kewatin, Hudson Bay, James Bay and Labrador, are catering for the souls of these primitive peoples in conditions as difficult as those which beset their confreres nearly 100 years ago.

To-day, in the Dominion of Canada, there are 1836 O.M.I. priests and brothers, engaged in every form of apostolic work, from the University of Ottawa, which they conduct, to the hut-chapels shrouded in poverty on the desolate Arctic coast. Their labours, with the blessing of Heaven and the Intercession of Mary Immaculate, have fructified in historic achievements for God's glory.

Of all the Mission-Fields entrusted to the Oblate Fathers, which cover one-seventh of the earth's surface, nowhere is their motto, "to preach the Gospel to the poor," more appropriate than amongst the nomad tribes of the Frozen North.



The Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate

An organisation of benefactors and friends of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate which by prayers and alms promotes Vocations to the Priesthood and Brotherhood among the Oblates and provides assistance for the ever-widening field of Oblate missionary leavours.

Established over 100 years ago, this charitable organisation has been granted many spiritual favours by the Holy See.

Enrolled members share in many spiritual privileges of the Oblate Fathers.

Membership of the Association supplements your membership of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

For fuller details write to:—

REV. DIRECTOR O.M.I.,

OBLATE FATHERS,

INCHICORE, DUBLIN W. 3

Read the "Lourdes Messenger" — a monthly publication of the Oblate Fathers. Price 3d.

ST. THOMAS COLLEGE

LIBRARY

NORTH BATTLEFORD, SASK.



NORTHERN CANADA – Note comparative size of Ireland